



LOVE IS...ALL AROUND

2017's annual Celebrity Martini Glass Auction
attendees show the love with record-breaking donations to PAWS

BY JOHN D. ADAMS

“General opinion's starting to make out that we live in a world of hatred and greed, but I don't see that. It seems to me that love is everywhere... If you look for it, I've got a sneaky feeling you'll find that love actually is all around.”

– Hugh Grant's prime minister character in the show 'Love, Actually'

Love in all of its splendor was in full bloom at 2017's annual Celebrity Martini Glass Auction (CMGA) in Naples, FL. Philanthropist and founder Brenda Melton asked attendees to open their hearts with her theme “Love Is...” And with open hearts came a bounty of open wallets. “Love Is...” was a record-breaking year for the CMGA, which raised more than \$600,000 in support of PAWS Assistant Dogs, a non-profit corporation that promotes in-

dependence for combat wounded veterans and children with life-changing disabilities through partnerships with skilled assistance dogs. “We asked the crowd to join us in the CMGA love story and they did,” Melton exclaimed. “Our amazing guests welcomed our veterans, making donations to fund more service-dogs-in-training and bidding both high and often on auction items that will ensure PAWS has the resources to continue meeting the needs of our wounded warriors. We couldn't be more thankful!”

LOVE IS...DEDICATION

Melton started the CMGA back in 2008 to aid fundraising efforts for the Naples Film Festival. Donations totaled an impressive \$21,000 that first year. After refocusing and refining her mission,



Love Story –
Autographed by Ryan O’Neal and Ali MacGraw



Signed by Harry Potter’s Gryffindor



Joe Torre



Hamilton

Melton’s CMGA has ever since concentrated efforts for the PAWS organization. “Brenda is the heart and soul of the event and the creative force behind it,” remarked Jeannie Bates, director of PAWS. The theme of each year’s event is up to Melton — and it can be a challenge. Upon reflection, it seems that her “Love Is...” theme was all around her, just waiting to blossom.

LOVE IS... SERENDIPITY

At last year’s CMGA, Melton met a couple who enthralled her – Lance Corporal Tim Donley and his wife Kelly. “I was greeting our guests, and I noticed this stunning woman with long, red, hair. She was with Tim, a double amputee. I said to them, ‘Thank you so much for your service and sacrifice,’ and that was about it. As they went away, I had this lingering feeling that I hadn’t said enough. How do you thank someone for putting their life on the line? I just came face to face with the true meaning of heroism. We are a free country because these men and women sacrifice every day.”

As Melton watched the couple, she noticed Kelly sitting in Tim’s lap. “They radiated so much love that I kept thinking about them. There’s a great story there, I thought.” And there was. Several months passed. “I still wasn’t sure of a theme,” recalled Melton. Then I learned that Ryan O’Neal and Ali MacGraw were going to be performing “Love Letters” at the Barbara B. Mann Theater. I remembered that they starred together in the movie “Love Story.” Melton reached out to them through Chef Norman



Left to right: Shemane and Ted Nugent with 2017 CMGA honorees Lance Corporal Tim Donley and wife Kelly.

Love and they graciously signed a “Love Story” martini glass. Shortly afterward, her friend Patty Baker, one of the producers for the Broadway smash “Hamilton” called. “Patty had a special martini glass for me – Lin-Manuel Miranda’s signature glass! I could hardly contain myself,” exclaimed Melton. “So now I have this glass, and I’m watching the Tony Awards, and Miranda gets up on stage and says, ‘Love is, love is, love...’ It just hit me. Love Is... That’s our theme! It’s all about love. Love is... so many things. Our veterans, our country, our animals, it is everywhere. The event was built around that.”

LOVE IS...MAGICAL

Love had struck Melton and she knew she wanted to honor that magnetic couple. “I asked Jeannie Bates at PAWS to tell me more about them,” said Melton. “Kelly was visiting her wounded brother, Mark, at Walter Reed Hospital,” Bates said. “During her visits, Tim and Kelly became friends. Then fell in love. This beautiful relationship arose from tragic circumstances.”

Lance Corporal Donley recalled: “Mark had many visitors as his family was close by. One of these was a beautiful young girl with long hair, gorgeous eyes and an obviously large heart.” Donley begged for a formal introduction (he is that kind of gentleman). “It quickly became apparent that she was not only someone who could understand my injuries, but someone who could understand my heart.” Two years to the date they met, the two were married.



Left to right: Jay and Patty Baker with Brenda and Phil Melton

PHOTOS: CHARLIE McDONALD

Melton was thrilled the couple accepted her invitation to the CMGA. “The auction was wonderful,” beamed Melton. “Everyone wanted to stay all night. And afterwards the candy land that Norman Love put on was beyond words. Florian Belanger from Food Network’s ‘Cupcake Wars’ was there with a full display. It was crazy good!” (See below).

“The CMGA After-Party is gaining a reputation on its own as a can’t-miss event!” enthused Bates. “Patrons were raving about the chefs, who really stepped it up this year to wow everyone. Crave Culinaire and Sea Salt returned this year and were joined by first-time participants Black Salt and Tacos & Tequila.”

Melton concluded: “Love transcends so many things. Just look at the Donleys’ special connection... I’m trying to make a difference in a happy, positive way. We don’t need any more anger. It is more important than ever to remember that love really is all around us.”



A SWEET ENDING TO THE 2017 CMGA

Meet the World-Famous Chocolatier and Master Patisserie Duo
Who Created the Decadent Fantasy After-Party

BY ALONA ABBADY MARTINEZ

CHOCOLATIER, NORMAN LOVE



Norman Love confesses he entered the chocolate business by happenstance. After a highly successful career as Corporate Pastry Chef for all Ritz Carlton Hotels,

Love, seeking more time with his family, left when an opportunity arose to produce a baking competition for the Food Network. To supplement his income, he began making chocolates in a 600 square-foot office.

“My focus was handmade, ultra-premium, with an artistic expression that didn’t exist in chocolates. Chocolates always looked the same, no matter if it was expensive or inexpensive,” Norman said.

Artisanal chocolates from Norman Love Confections



In January 2001, just three months after he began, *USA Today* named Norman Love Confections in the “Top Ten Places To Buy Chocolates for Valentines,” catapulting him into the spotlight. Sixteen years later, Norman Love operates five chocolate salons, two production facilities, and a vibrant e-commerce business that allows his chocolates, created in Southwest Florida, to reach fans around the country.

MASTER PÂTISSERIE, FLORIAN BELLANGER

Florian Bellanger, acclaimed judge on the hit TV Food Network show, “Cupcake Wars”, is Executive Pastry Chef and Co-Owner of Mad-Mac, “The Authentic French Macarons and Madeleines” French cookie and pastry company which he co-founded in 2006.

Bellanger spent much of his afternoons as a child baking for his family. At age 15, he applied to Paris’s prestigious pastry school, the *École de Paris des*

Norman Love & Florian Bellanger Glass at CMGA



Métiers de la Table, only to be rejected because he was too young. A year later he was accepted, overcame a childhood chocolate allergy, and went on to specialize in pastry, ice cream and chocolate.

Prior to Mad-Mac, Bellanger was Fauchon’s executive pastry chef in the U.S. Bellanger was also pastry chef at New York’s 3-Michelin star iconic eatery *Le Bernardin* from 1996-2001. “Everything is possible when beautiful souls gathered together to financially help our Veterans in need,” said Chef Bellanger. “As a French macarons maker and pastry chef for over 30 years, I always feel that ‘sweets’ can contribute to make this world a bit ‘sweeter’ and nicer. It was my pleasure to help raise funds for PAWS.”

To learn more about the CMGA, visit: www.naplescmga.com

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